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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000024

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY IN NAJAF, ONLY MINOR ABUSES
REPORTED

REF: A. 08 BAGHDAD 3562

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 0011

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The election campaign has begun in Najaf with incumbent ISCI officials hoping that the popularity of development projects will help keep them in control of the province. A top local politician from Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa party, meanwhile, hoped the Prime Minister's personal popularity would help boost the Da'wa score in the January 31 provincial elections. During a visit by PMIN and Poloffs on December 27-28, those running against ISCI welcomed international observers at polling locations. Local officials reported that campaign intimidation has been largely absent in Najaf. END SUMMARY.

Incumbent ISCI Officials Optimistic

[1](#)2. (U) The provincial election campaign has begun in Najaf, with placards and billboards on display all over the city. Especially prominent are posters with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's "State of Law" coalition and Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim's coalition, "Shahid al-Mihrab" (Martyrs of the Pulpit) with the slogan "With you, with you." Provincial elections are scheduled for January 31. The Shia holy month of Muharram is approximately December 29-January 27.

[1](#)3. (C) PMIN and Poloffs on December 28 visited provincial government officials in Najaf, including Governor Asad Kalal al-Tai and Provincial Council Chairman Abd Abud al-Musawi, both of whom predicted the elections would change little in the province. Tai, a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), told PMIN that despite the posters, Najaf has yet to see many campaign rallies or speeches. ISCI officials, especially Deputy Governor Abd Baqr Abtan, are trying to continue ISCI's dominance in Najaf by touting successful reconstruction projects like the recently-opened Najaf Airport (ref A). Governor Tai praised the work done the Najaf Governorate Elections Office (GEO) chair Bushra al-Zamili. (Note. Zamili is rumored to be pro-ISCI and married to a Badr Organization colonel. End note.)

PM Maliki Coattails?

[1](#)4. (C) Separately, Sheikh Fayad al-Shimmeri, a member of Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa party on the Najaf provincial council, predicted that Da'wa would score well on January 31. He anticipated that Da'wa would raise its seat total from nine on the council now to 11 - 12 seats. He cited two factors. First, he predicted Najaf public dissatisfaction with ISCI management of the province's affairs, and in particular high unemployment. Second, he thought the Prime Minister has gained popularity and his coattails would help Da'wa in Najaf.

ISCI Opposition Sees No Intimidation, Minor Abuses

15. (S) PMIN and Poloffs met on December 27 with Radwan Killidar and Emad Kalantar, both of whom are members of prominent Najaf families, close with the marja'iyah (Shia clerics), and anti-ISCI. Killidar and Kalantar said there has been little, if any, election related violence in Najaf -- they only criticized ISCI's use of government vehicles and printing presses for campaign purposes. Sheikh Fayad al-Shimmeri told us he had not seen electoral intimidation. He merely complained that ISCI is illegally placing its campaign posters on government property. PMIN urged all contacts to report campaign irregularities to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and, noting our keen interest in a credible election, asked that we be kept informed too.

16. (S) Killidar and Kalantar welcomed the idea of international observers during the election to help reduce what they perceived as inevitable abuses. Both predicted ongoing financial support from the Iranian government to its favored ISCI-led coalition (ref B) and cited Najaf's GEO chair Zamili's ISCI ties as evidence of potential elections tampering.

Comment

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17. (C) One recent poll undertaken by an implementer of Mission work on democracy noted that Maliki has a 75 percent approval rating in South-Central Iraq (where Najaf is located). ISCI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, who figures prominently on ISCI posters all over Najaf, had only a 31 percent rating according to this poll. However, 26 percent of the poll's respondents said that they would vote for ISCI as their first choice; only 17 percent said that they would vote for Da'wa. (Indeed, another Shia Islamist party, Fadilah, slightly outpolled Da'wa in south-central Iraq in this December poll.) It will be interesting to see if Prime Minister Maliki decides to campaign more directly for Da'wa since he seems to be a major asset for his party and his party needs help. END COMMENT.
CROCKER